DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 108 091 CG 009 911

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TITLE Orientation and Extra Curricular Programming for Students Over 30.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (57th, San Francisco, California, March 30-April 2, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Students; *Cocurricular Activities; College Students; Guidelines; Higher Education; *Individual Needs; *Program Development; Speeches; *Student Personnel Programs

ABSTRACT

Because the needs of mature students are so radically different than the 18-22 year-old student, it is essential that student personnel workers respond to these needs by creating specially designed orientation and extra-curricular programs. This document offers an itemization of all factors that must be considered in designing a complete program for mature students. The major topic areas of the outline include: (1) the nature of an institution's mature students, (2) the needs of these students in regard to special programing, (3) the areas which should be covered in the orientation process; and (4) the need to attract and hold mature students, in light of the declining enrollment of traditionally-aged students. (Author/PC)

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Orientation and Extra Curricular Programming for Students Over 30

NASPA Conference 1975

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As indicated in 1973 Carnegie Commission on Higher Education report, about 42% of all students on college and university campuses are adults. In 1947, 18% of the U.S. 2.3 million college students were between 25 and 34. In 1973, 22% of the U.S. 8.1 million college students were between 25 and 34.

Because the needs of the mature student are so radically different than those of the traditionally aged student (18-22) it is, therefore, essential that student affairs personnel respond to these needs by creating specially designed orientation and extra curricular programs. In order to insure the success of these programs, it is necessary to tap the resources of the entire college community (academic as well as student affairs).

The following outline is not in and of itself a program but rather an itemization of all factors that must be considered in designing a complete program for mature students.

A. Who are your institution's mature students, how many of them are there, and why are they coming to college?

1. Why should we educate mature students?
   a. Everyone should have the right to be educated
   b. Mature people are the people who have the power in our society
   c. Mature people who attend college will be more likely to support tax increases for education, plus they will be more likely to recommend higher education to their children and friends
   d. Increased enrollment of mature students will help to offset the decreased enrollment of traditionally aged students

2. Mature students return for a variety of different reasons:
   a. Job related goals
   b. Personal reasons and/or leisure time activity

3. Some of the programs that attract mature students are:
   a. Womens' programs
   b. Veterans programs
   c. Labor education
   d. Continuing education for the professions: teachers, doctors, dentists, etc.
   e. Programs for older Americans
   f. Continuing education for business and industry
   g. Cooperative extension service
   h. Civil Defense/emergency preparedness

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4. A small number of mature students need special attention in terms of orientation and extra curricular programming as much, if not more so, than a large number.

5. In order to plan an effective program for students over 30 at your institution, you must first know:
   a. Who are your mature students?
   b. How many of them are there?
   c. Why are they coming to your college or university?

B. Once you have identified your population, you must identify their needs before planning special programs to meet them.

1. Don't attempt to tell your mature students their needs, let them tell you.
   a. Select a team of mature students that are currently at your institution to help you plan and execute an orientation program for mature students.
   b. Have informal discussions with mature students concerning their problems and ideas.
   c. Send out anonymous surveys to mature students concerning their feelings and ideas. (Mature students are extremely reluctant to criticize the system if they are asked to sign their names.)
   d. Encourage mature student groups to submit proposals for institutional change to the administration that will make the institution more responsive to the needs of its mature students.

2. Some of the needs that mature students have nationally are:
   a. A person or office within the institution where they can go to find answers to their questions, to bolster their confidence and to gain support. Mature students must have a positive atmosphere or many won't continue.
      (1) Developmentally, this center will be most effective if it is directed and staffed by mature students as well as professional staff members.
   b. They need effective academic advisement. Regardless of whether they are full or part-time students, whether they have or have not declared a major, that first semester they need to take:
      (1) Courses where they will have a high chance of success
      (2) Courses that will turn them on
      (3) Courses that will apply to a degree
      (4) Courses taught by faculty members who are sensitive to and enthusiastic about teaching older students
   c. If an institution requires an SAT, ACT, etc. as a part of its entrance requirements, mature students will often need coaching.
   d. Mature students are consumers with consumers' attitudes. They want and need:
      (1) Convenience
      (2) Confidence
      (3) To obtain a degree as quickly and as inexpensively as possible which includes: a waiver of the entrance examination requirement for students who have been out of high school five years or more, credit by examination (CLEP tests, etc.), life experience credit, night courses, etc.
      (4) In some cases, they want to take courses for personal enrichment; therefore, they do not want to be hassled by declaring a major, distribution requirements, etc.

e. Child care centers on the campus which operate both during the day and in the evening at a reasonable cost.
f. Separate support groups or clubs that help to meet the emotional needs of men and women.
g. To have the separate support groups combined periodically to:
   (1) Meet the mature student and his/her family's social needs
   (2) Make proposals for institutional change to the administration that will make the institution more responsive to the needs of its mature students.

C. What areas should be covered in the orientation process?

1. Mature students need to know much of the same information that younger students need to know; however, the method of presentation needs to be changed somewhat.
   a. Academic information
      (1) Who their advisor is and where s/he is located.
      (2) How to register: terminology, what to bring, how to fill out the forms, etc.
      (3) How to study and take tests.
      (4) How to budget their time.
      (5) What academic services are available to them: remedial courses, tutors, academic advisement, etc.
   b. University and community information
      (1) The physical plan of the institution
      (2) The structure of the University and its personnel
      (3) The extra curricular clubs and organizations available
      (4) Special programs available for women, commuters, veterans, minority students, transfer students
      (5) The financial aid and work opportunities available
      (6) The various student services available: career counseling, counseling student activities, housing, dining facilities, health services, etc.

2. Mature students as a group have many of the same personal orientation needs that traditionally aged students have:
   a. They need to make at least two or three good friends and a small group of acquaintenances with whom they feel comfortable
   b. As commuters, they need to feel a part of the campus
   c. They need to develop self-confidence and to realize that they can succeed
   d. They need to lose their fears and develop a feeling of belonging
   e. They need to have the opportunity to interact with other new students in a relaxed atmosphere prior to the beginning of the semester
   f. They need to know where to go when all else fails

3. Mature students as a group also have some unique personal orientation needs:
   a. For them, higher education is a family affair (requiring a sacrifice of time and money on the part of the entire family); therefore, orientation, too, must be a "family affair". (The mature students family must understand the academic demands placed on the student, become familiar with the campus and the activities that go on there, as well as get to know the families of other mature students.)

b. Mature students need to become aware that the professor is not always right and that healthy discussion and difference of opinion is a part of the educational process and is expected.
c. Mature students need to realize that faculty members and administrators are approachable and do take an interest in students and are therefore not too busy to deal with individual questions and/or problems.
d. Mature students need extra encouragement in order to feel that they can and will succeed.

4. A committee of mature student volunteers should be utilized to help plan and execute a special orientation program for mature students.

5. An effective orientation social event might be planned for graduate students, mature students, and new faculty at the beginning of the year.

6. Due to the limited amount of time that mature students have, the program should effectively cover the essentials in the shortest amount of time possible.
   a. Mature students tend to read the materials given to them while traditionally aged students do not. One way to efficiently, yet effectively, orient mature students is to give out pamphlets on various topics: campus maps, town maps, campus information, town information, etc.

7. Because mature students do have set time commitments, it is wise to run a mature student orientation program at least twice: once during the day and once at night.

8. Child care should be available during the mature student orientation program.

D. In view of the declining enrollment of traditionally aged college students, colleges need to attract and hold mature students.

1. Academic changes that need to be considered:
   a. Waive college entrance exams for students who have been out of high school more than five years because:
      (1) Exams scare mature students
      (2) Exams don't measure motivation which is a key factor in adult education: young people prepare for the future; adults study for <u>now</u>
      (3) Mature students don't perform well in a timed test
   b. Offer students the option of taking desired courses without pursuing a degree
   c. Set up an academic advisement center with peer advisors that has daytime as well as evening hours
   d. Offer night courses
   e. Give college credit for life experience: CLEP
   f. Wherever possible, reduce the number of trips that the mature student must make to campus. For example, register by mail, televised courses, on the job practicums, independent studies, etc.
   g. Credit by examination

2. Special extra curricular programs and student services should be designed with the mature student in mind.
   a. Support clubs for mature men and mature women
   b. A lounge area for mature students complete with lockers, study area, small kitchenette, etc.
   c. Reserve sections at football games and other popular sports events for mature students and their families
   d. A Mature Student Newsletter mailed to the students' home on a regular basis telling them about coming events, special services, as well as campus and community information that would be of special interest to them
   e. "Family I.D." or Activities" cards that would entitle the mature students' entire family to participate in campus activities, take books out of the library, etc.
   f. Have special breakfast and/or luncheon meal plans available for mature students
   g. Designate "suite style" residence halls or older homes that are owned by the college as mature student housing

3. Special plans should be made to sensitize the faculty concerning the mature student.
   a. Meetings should be held with the Deans and Department Chairmen
      (1) To make them aware that many faculty members will need help in adapting to mature students in their classes
      (2) To make them aware that adulthood, as well as adolesence, is a developmental period - one in which the stakes are very high
      (3) To outline the character of the mature student: their needs, their reasons for being in college, and their expectations
      (4) To make them aware of the areas where the mature student feels let down or used. For example, mature students often feel that professors do not see their experience gained through living as being important. Also, because mature students tend to be better organized, traditionally aged students or the professor may tend to take advantage of them especially in group project situations